

Message Text

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ACTION OPIC-06

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FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

TO AMEMBASSY GABORONE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EMIN EINV BC US

SUBJECT:POSSIBLE U.S. INVESTMENT IN DIAMOND CUTTING OPERATION

REF: GABORONE 236

1. NATHAN LEIBLER OF UNIVERSAL MINES IS WELL KNOWN TO EMBASSY FREETOWN. HE TRAVELS TO SIERRA LEONE AT LEAST THREE TIMES A YEAR, SOMETIMES STAYING FOR UP TO TWO MONTHS. LEIBLER HAS BEEN FRIENDLY AND INFORMATIVE, AND NEVER ARRIVES IN COUNTRY WITHOUT CALLING ON EMBASSY.

2. UNIVERSAL MINES IS ONE OF SEVERAL AMERICAN FIRMS THAT WERE GRANTED LICENSES IN 1974 FOR THE LOCAL PURCHASE OF ALLUVIALLY MINED DIAMONDS AND SUBSEQUENT EXPORT OF THEM. PREVIOUSLY ALL SIERRA LEONEAN DIAMONDS HAD BEEN SOLD DIRECTLY THROUGH THE CENTRAL SELLING ORGANIZATION IN LONDON.

3. UNIVERSAL MINES' INVOLVEMENT WITH SIERRA LEONE DATES PRIOR TO RECEIPT OF EXPORT PERMISSION. LEIBLER CLAIMS THAT UM HAS FOR MANY YEARS BEEN CUTTING AND POLISHING SL DIAMONDS THAT HAVE BEEN PURCHASED FROM PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS OF UNCUT SL STONES. AMBASSADOR VISITED UM HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER 1975. OPERATION
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EMPLOYS MORE THAN A DOZEN POLISHERS AND APPEARS TO

DISTRIBUTE BROADLY THROUGHOUT THE US, ESPECIALLY SMALLER STONES.

4. COMMENT LEIBLER MADE STRONG ATTEMPT IN NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER TO BE RECIPIENT OF AN OFFICIAL PORTION OF NATIONAL DIAMOND MINING COMPANY (DIMINCO) SALES. DIMINCO IS 51 PERCENT GOSL-OWNED, 49 PERCENT OWNED AND MANAGED BY SL SELECTION TRUST. DEBEERS, WHICH FORMERLY BOUGHT ALL PRODUCTION, NOW LIMITED TO 50 PERCENT WITH SEVERAL OTHER BUYERS GETTING SET PERCENTAGES OF REMAINING PRODUCTION. THESE SALES ARE THE CREAM OF SL EXPORTS AND LEIBLER'S ATTEMPT WAS, TO SOME EXTENT, SHOT IN THE DARK. HE HAS FAILED FOR THIS YEAR, BUT PROBABLY WILL TRY AGAIN NEXT YEAR. LEIBLER KNOWS DEBEERS REPRESENTATIVE IN BOTSWANA, SINCE BOTH RESIDED IN SIERRA LEONE AT SAME TIME SAMUELS

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